

A
REPRESENTATION,

Of the Present

State of Religion,

With regard to the late excessive Growth of
Infidelity, Heresy, and Profaneness :

Drawn up by the

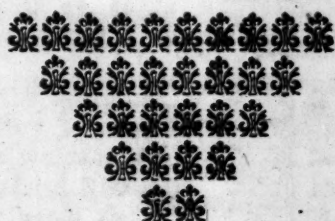
Upper House of Convocation,

OF THE

Province of CANTERBURY,

AND

Transmitted to the **LOWER HOUSE** for
Their Approbation.



L O N D O N :

Printed for JONAH BOWYER, at the *Rose* in *Ludgate-street*

1711.

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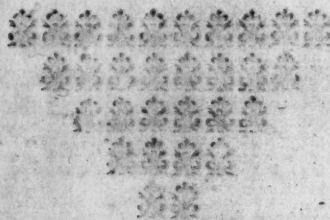
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L O N D O N :

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May it please Your Majesty,

WE, the Archbishop, the Bishops, and the Clergy of the Province of Canterbury, in Convocation assembled, are deeply sensible of the many Blessings and Advantages of Your Gracious and Prosperous Reign: Amongst which, there is none that more affects us, than the tender Care and Concern shewn by Your Majesty for the flourishing State of Religion, and the Godly Zeal You have express'd against the Wickedness of Those, who, by loose and profane Principles and Practices, have endeavour'd to undermine and destroy it.

We are thankful to Almighty God, who hath put it into Your Royal Heart to repress these impious and daring Attempts; and, for that End, among others, to order Your Clergy to be called together, that they might in Synod, humbly offer their Counsel and Assistance.

It is, on many Accounts, our Duty, to do the utmost that in us lies; towards promoting so excellent a Work. We have, therefore, apply'd our selves with diligence to consider the Matters to us referr'd; and do now, in Obedience to Your Royal Commands, humbly lay before Your Majesty,

A REPRESENTATION of the present State of Religion among Us, with regard to the late excessive Growth of Infidelity, Heresy and Prophaneness.

IT is with the greatest Affliction and Concern, that we enter upon a Work so unpleasant in all Respects, were it not for the Hopes it gives us of seeing these Evils in some measure removed; and therefore, we shall not give Your Majesty the Uneasiness of a particular Relation, either of the blasphemous Passages that have been publish'd from the Press, or the great Impieties that have been committed: But in discharge of the Trust reposed in us by Your Majesty, we think our selves obliged to lay before You such an Account of the Progress of Infidelity, Heresy, and Prophaneness amongst us, as may let Your Majesty see the Causes and Occasions which have given the greatest rise to them, and the sad Consequences with which they are attended.

It is hard to come to the beginning of these great Evils, which all times have complain'd of; and therefore to confine our own Enquiries, and lessen Your Majesty's Trouble as much as we can, we shall look no farther back for the Source of them, than that long unnatural Rebellion, which loosen'd all the Bonds of Discipline and Order, and overturn'd the goodly Frame of our Ecclesiastical and Civil Constitution.

The Hypocrisy, Enthusiasm, and variety of wild and monstrous Errors which abounded during those Confusions, begat in the Minds of many Men too easily carried into Extremes, a disregard for the very Forms of Religion and proved the Occasion of great Libertinism, and Prophaneness, which hath ever since too much prevail'd amongst us; the Seeds of Infidelity and Heresy which were then sown did soon after appear, and the Tares have sprung up in great abundance.

The Authority of the present Canon of Scripture hath been represented as standing upon a very precarious Foundation, and the Inspiration of the whole hath been call'd in Question.

The Miracles recorded in Scripture have been disputed and compared to the fabulous Relations of those that occur in Heathen Writers.

All Mysteries in Religion have been exploded as absurd and useless Speculations, and several Fundamental Articles of our most Holy Faith have not only been call'd in question, but rejected.

The *Arrian* and *Socinian* Heresies have been propagated with great Boldness; The Doctrine of a *Trinity of Persons in the Unity of the Godhead*, hath been deny'd and scoffed at; The Satisfaction made for the Sins of Mankind, by the precious Blood of Christ hath been either directly renounced, or very ungratefully lessen'd; The Establish'd Creeds of the Church have been represented as unwarrantable Impositions:

Even at this time when we are thus met by Your Majesty's Writ, and exhorted by Your Gracious LETTER to consult of Methods for repressing pernicious Errors and Impieties, a Book hath been Printed, wherein the *Arrian* Doctrine (of which we cannot but declare our utter Abhorrence) is avow'd and maintain'd, and the Truth of it is threatned to be shewn by large and elaborate Proofs in other Treaties from the same Hand, which are soon to follow. To this Book the Author hath prefix'd his Name, and hath not been afraid to dedicate it to the Archbishop, Bishops and Clergy of this Province, in Convocation assembled, with Invitation to all to encourage his Design by their Subscriptions to it, and not without laying the Imputation of *Antichristianism* upon all those who shall not approve it.

The natural Immortality of the Soul hath upon different Schemes and Views been oppos'd as a vulgar Error, and the Necessity of all Humane Thoughts and Actions hath been asserted, to the overturning the Foundations of all Religion, whether, natural or instituted, and to the rendring all Notions of Good and Evil, of Rewards and Punishments, whether in this Life, or the next groundless and vain.

Others have endeavour'd to root out of Mens Minds all Notions of a Church, as a Society instituted by Christ, with peculiar Powers and Privileges, and proper Officers to administer the Word and Sacraments; and so to blend and confound the Spiritual Society with the Temporal as to make every thing in Religion, its divine Truths, and most sacred Ordinances dependant on the Will of the Civil Magistrate, as deriving solely from him their Sanction and Authority. Nay, these Religious Ordinances themselves, even the Chief of them, *Baptism* and the *Supper of the Lord* have been spoken of with such a degree of ungodly Mockery and Scorn, as to fill the Hearts of good Christians with Horror and Astonishment.

The Frauds of *Pagan* and *Popish Priests* have been display'd, in order to represent all Priests as Imposters upon the Credulity of Mankind; and draw Infamy upon the Priesthood in general, and to render the Order it self, in what Religion soever it was found, equally the Object of publick Aversion and Contempt.

The Books containing the Errors and Impieties abovemention'd have been the more easily publish'd and dispers'd since the Expiration of the Act for restraining the Press; and thro' the greater liberty of Printing, which thereon ensu'd, have the Vicious and Profane had more Opportunities to scatter their Papers for corrupting the Manners of Men.

Not only several Pieces formerly written on the side of Infidelity, which might have been forgotten without such a Revival, have been collected into Volumes, and publish'd again, but Mock-Catechisms fram'd in a light manner have been cry'd in the Streets, to depreciate the excellent Summaries of our Christian Faith, and as far as possible to root out of Mens Minds, the Sense of those great Truths that are contain'd in them.

This Profaneness hath been much increased by the Licentiousness of the Stage, where the worst Examples have been placed in the best Lights, and recommended to Imitation; and the various Images thus Painted to the Life, and set out with all manner of Advantage, have made such Impressions upon the Minds of the Young and Unwary, as are not easy to be effaced. Where the Bond of Wedlock hath been generally treated as a ridiculous and burthensom Yoke, to the great Prejudice of Society and Virtue, and every thing Sacred hath been expos'd. Where the Office of the Priesthood hath been made a matter of Scorn and Reproach; and whereat the opening a New Theatre, the building of Churches was impiously derided, as a vain and useless Work, the Effect only of Superstition and Ignorance.

It is indeed for the purpose of the Irreligious to discourage the Building of Churches where they are so much wanted, and where the want of them is in all appearance, one great Occasion of the Irreligion of many. For by this means, vast numbers of Souls have, in and about these two populous Cities, been excluded from a Possibility of attending the Publick Worship of God, and from all the Benefits of Christian Instruction. And the natural Consequence of this hath been a gradual Defection from Piety and Virtue to Irreligious Ignorance, and all manner of loose, and licentious Living.

And as the want of Churches here, so the want of competent Maintenance for the Service of many that are in the Country, where two or three Cures do not often afford enough to support a Minister, is, tho' not a late, yet a like Occasion of Profaneness and Ignorance there: For, by this means many Parishes have no Minister residing among them, and are several Sundays in the Year without any Service at all; and the Ministers, by having so much Duty upon them, cannot discharge it as they ought, nor have time for the Catechising young Persons, which is so necessary a part of Christian Instruction.

And to the Increase of this Mischief, both in City and Country, have They also contributed, who have taken occasion from the Relaxation of those Laws which made Absence from the Establish'd Church penal, to withdraw themselves entirely from all Religious Assemblies, altho' the very Act of Exemption, which gave Liberty in one respect, equally restrained it in the other.

From these several Occasions hath ensued a great Neglect of the religious Observance of the Lord's Day, too great a part of which is spent by many in Publick Houses, and other Diversions wholly unsuitable to the time set apart for the more immediate Service of God; tho' we have reason to think, that through the Care of Magistrates and others, some Reformation hath been made of this Matter.

But whatever share any of the Causes and Occasions abovementioned may have had in that Growth of Infidelity, Heresy, and Profaneness amongst us, We cannot but bewail the Effect; considering the Dishonour it brings on our Holy Faith, our Church, and Nation; and the Hurt it has done to Your Majesty's People, many of whom have been made worse Men, and worse Subjects, by the Means of it.

It is lamentable to reflect how many Souls have been lost by imbibing wicked Doctrines from those Books which have been scattered for several Years through this Kingdom; how many more are endangered by too near Approaches to Infidelity (tho' they have not as yet actually arrived to it) from a Spirit of Indifference and Neutrality in Religion which hath been infused into their Minds by these Means.

But what we have further to apprehend from our Impieties is, that they have made us obnoxious to the Displeasure of Almighty God, who may justly on their Account be provoked to visit us with his judgments, by stopping the continued Current of Success with which he hath hitherto blessed our Affairs, and delivering us into the Hands of our Enemies; by withdrawing the pure Light of his Gospel from us, and letting in the Abomination of Popery among us.

For the Emissaries from Rome have been all along very watchful to lay hold of these Opportunities for the Advancement of their Cause; to which nothing is so serviceable as Scepticism and Looseness of Life: These therefore, as well as the Errors and Divisions amongst us, they have always encouraged to the best of their Power, and improved to their own Advantage; representing in several Books, as well as in their common Conversation, the great Uncertainty of the Christian Religion upon Protestant Principles, and filling Mens Minds with infinite Doubts, the better to make them submit to an infallible Guide. They have swarmed in our Streets of late Years, as they do more particularly at this time, and are very busy in making Converts: Nor do we doubt but that divers of Your Majesty's Subjects, either from the Scandal taken at the Infidelity, Heresy, and Profaneness they see, or from sharing the Contagion of it, have, by their Arts, been perverted.

But notwithstanding that we have these Things to complain of, so much hath been done already toward taking off the Causes and Effects of these Evils, and to prevent the further Consequences of them, as to give us great hopes, that through the Blessing of God upon Your Majesty's Authority and Example, and the Endeavours of Your Subjects in their several Stations, we shall escape the Danger we have so much reason to fear.

For

For as Books have been published in favour of Heresy, and downright Infidelity; so others have been written from time to time, as occasion required, in Defence of the Fundamental Truths whether of Natural or Reveal'd Religion, with great Clearness and Strength of Argument: The vain Pleas of the several Advocates for Infidelity have been particularly considered and refuted, to the Silencing, if not the Conviction, of some of the principal of them.

A Lecture was Founded, not many Years since, by Mr. *Boyle*, in Defence of the Christian Religion against all the Adversaries of it; and many excellent and useful Sermons have been Preached and Published upon that Occasion.

Societies have been formed for the Reformation of Manners; Funds of Charity have been raised for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, and of Christian Knowledge at Home, and for the pious Education of poor Children: Great variety of plain and useful Discourses have been distributed among the meaner sort for their more easy Improvement; and Parochial Libraries have been set up for the Use of Ministers in the Country, that they might be better provided for the Instruction of those committed to their Charge.

Authority hath often interposed for the countenancing these excellent Designs, and for withstanding the bold Attempts that have been made upon our common Faith; and for preventing the Increase of Irreligion and Profaneness, Royal Injunctions and Proclamations have issued, Acts of Parliament have passed, Prosecutions at Law have been ordered, Gracious Speeches from the Throne have been made, and from thence such bright Patterns of Piety and Virtue have shone forth, as have, no doubt, prevailed upon many, tho' the Influence of them hath not extended so far as might have been expected.

But then the Infidelity of some hath been attended with this good Consequence in others, that the Zeal of devout Persons hath thereby been excited to do every thing that in them lay towards resisting and stemming the Increase of this great Evil: Nor have their Endeavours been altogether fruitless; our Eyes daily see the happy Effects of them; Divine Service and Sacraments have of late been oftner celebrated, and better frequented, than formerly; the Catechising of Youth hath been more generally practised, and with greater Success; vast Sums have been furnished by private Contributions to sustain the Charge of Educating poor Children in the pious manner abovementioned; and many other new and noble Institutions of Charity have been set on foot.

Many Churches have been Repaired and Adorned at the Expence of the several Parishioners, and other Benefactors; and many Chapels opened in the larger Parishes, tho' not sufficient to answer the Wants of the Inhabitants. Great Sums of Money have been by Publick Authority Provided and Applied for the Building, Supporting, and Adorning other Churches; and Your Majesty has been graciously pleased, upon our humble Address, to recommend to Your Parliament to find out Means for the Building of such as are still wanting: of which from the great Satisfaction with which Your Message was receiv'd, and the great Progress made upon it, we hope to see the blessed Effect; when all, who are religiously disposed, will have the Opportunity of giving publick Testimony of it, and the Careless be left without Excuse.

In the mean time other Methods of Redressing these Mischiefs may, we humbly conceive, be successfully tried, such as Your Majesty's great Wisdom and Piety, and the foregoing Observations, will suggest to You.

We entertain not the least Doubt of Your Majesty's firm Resolution to render the Laws and Proclamations set forth for the Suppression of Immorality and Profaneness useful to that purpose, by an impartial and vigorous Execution of them; and to Reform the Corruptions of the Stage, which have been so instrumental in vitiating young and innocent Minds, and have given so just Offence to all serious and devout Christians.

We are entirely perswaded, that Your Majesty will, in the most effectual manner, discountenance all such Persons as are profligate in their Lives, or the known Abettors and Spreaders of Impious Opinions; and the repeated Assurances which Your Majesty (whom God long preserve) hath been pleased to give to Your People of Your Care to transmit the Succession of the Crown in the Protestant Line as Establish'd by Law, give us great Hopes, that our Enemies of the Romish Communion will at last be effectually discouraged from attempting the Ruin of that Excellent Church, of which, under Christ, Your Majesty is the chief Governour, and glorious Defender.

From

From the Application of these several Means, which we do not doubt but Your Majesty will use, we promise ourselves very great and durable Effects: But that for which we at present in most earnest and most humble manner address ourselves to Your Majesty is, That by Your Royal Interposition, an Act may be obtained for Restraining the present excessive and scandalous Liberty of Printing wicked Books at Home, and importing the like from Abroad; in such manner as to the Wisdom of Your Majesty, and Your Parliament, shall seem most expedient. For as we take this Liberty to have been one chief Source and Cause of those Evils whereof we have spoken, so we question not but the Restraint of it would go a great way in the Cure of them.

There is another pernicious Custom that has very much prevail'd amongst us under the false Notion of Honour, which we beg Leave to mention in this place, and that is the Practice of Fighting Duels, which has so far obtain'd, that Your Majesty hath had many Occasions, and some very lately, to see the dismal Effects of it.

We do therefore, in all humble Duty, beg Your Majesty to take the most effectual Methods to extinguish those false Notions, so contrary to the Laws of God, and so destructive of all Society, and to put a Stop to this wicked and unchristian Practice by such Means as Your Majesty, in Your great Wisdom, shall think most proper.

We have also good hope, that all employed in *Authority under Your Majesty*, will, as we pray, *truly and indifferently minister Justice to the Punishment of Wickedness and Vice, and to the Maintenance of true Religion and Virtue*; and wish that some Way may be found for the Recovery and Improvement of Christian Knowledge and Piety in Families, which we fear is too much neglected.

We likewise hope, that especial Care will be taken of the Education of young People at the Universities, by providing that Tutors make it their Business to teach their Pupils the Principles of the Christian Religion in the course of their other Studies, and endeavour to make them serious in it, with a particular Eye to such as are designed for Holy Orders.

And for Ourselves, who are called to this Holy Function; We beg Leave to assure your Majesty, that we will take all possible Care of the Discharge of our own Duty, and do all that in us lies, that the Canons of our Church may be strictly observed both by Ourselves and those committed to our Charge.

We have those Parts of our Discipline which Your Majesty hath in your great Goodness thought fit to recommend to us for further Improvement, under our most serious Consideration; and hope, in some measure to answer the Wants of the Church, and Your Majesty's Expectations in referring them to us; as we shall at all times hereafter, as often as Your Majesty shall be pleased to require our Attendance for these Purposes, endeavour to make our Synodical Meetings subservient to the good Order and Establishment of this Church, the Interest and Advantage of the Christian Religion, the Satisfaction of Your Majesty, and the Honour of God.

And our daily and fervent Prayer to God shall be, That Your Majesty may be the happy Instrument of these and many other Blessings to this Church and State; That you may be as prosperous in your Designs against Infidelity and Vice here at Home, as you have been in all your Undertakings against the Common Enemy Abroad; and may by that means add what alone is wanting to compleat the Glory, and crown the Successes of your ever memorable Reign.

F I N I S.